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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 003013

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STATE FOR INL/PC LAURA MCKECHNIE
EMBASSIES FOR INL OR NARCOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: RESULTS OF MINI-DUBLIN GROUP MEETING
2005

REF: SECSTATE 200169

1. (U) On November 4, 2005, Post convened a meeting of the Salvadoran Mini-Dublin Group (MDG). In attendance were representatives from the Embassies of Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. The following provides information requested in Reftel and a summary of MDG bilateral, counter-narcotics support to El Salvador.

General Drug Situation

2. (U) El Salvador is a transit country for narcotics, mainly cocaine and heroin. Cocaine from Colombia typically transits El Salvador via the Pan-American Highway and via maritime routes off the country's Pacific coast. Heroin from Colombia usually goes through Panama, then via courier on a commercial passenger flight to El Salvador to another commercial flight to Honduras and then by bus to Guatemala. The Pan-American and Littoral Highways are the land routes preferred by traffickers. As in the rest of Central America, there has been a notable increase in the amount of heroin transiting both the international airport and land ports of entry. Both heroin and cocaine also transit by sea off the Salvadoran coast as well as through Salvadoran airspace.

3. (U) Climate and soil conditions do not favor the cultivation of coca plants. Small quantities of cannabis are produced in the mountainous regions along the border with Guatemala and Honduras. However, the cannabis is of poor quality and is consumed domestically. Precursor chemical production and transit either do not exist, or occur at undetectable levels.

4. (U) According to a study conducted by Salvadoran NGO FundaSalva, six percent of males and one percent of females use drugs at least once a month. The vast majority of these individuals are between the ages of 18 and 34. Marijuana is the most popular drug, with 22 percent of men and four percent of women trying the drug at least once in their life.

El Salvador's Anti-Narcotics Strategy

5. (U) In November 2003, the government enacted a new counter-narcotics law that contains a stronger and more well-defined conspiracy provision, increases the penalties for a broad range of drug-related offenses, and includes additional aggravating circumstances that can further enhance penalties. It also punishes simple possession of illegal drugs and better defines procedures for the use of undercover agents, undercover buys, controlled deliveries, and confidential informants.

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6. (U) Salvadoran law enforcement efforts are still hindered by constitutional prohibitions on investigative tools such as wiretapping. The government gives a very high priority to counter-narcotics law enforcement, but its available resources are inadequate to achieve all of its counter-narcotics objectives. Nevertheless, from January to September 2005, the Anti-Narcotics Police seized 400 kilograms (kg) of marijuana, 27 kg of cocaine, 20 kg of heroin, and five kg of crack, with a total street value of USD \$2.7 million.

7. (U) El Salvador is a party to the following conventions: 1988 UN Drug Convention; 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances; 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol; UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; Central American convention for the Prevention of Money Laundering Related to Drug-Trafficking and Similar Crimes; Central American Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement; Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters

Bilateral Counter-Narcotics Assistance

18. (U) The United States is the only Mini-Dublin Group (MDG) member to provide bilateral counter-narcotics assistance to El Salvador. The other MDG members contribute aid through the United Nations, the OAS, or the European Union. All provide funding for after school programs for at-risk youths. France, Germany, and Italy provide support to Central America as a region, rather than focusing on any particular country. Japan sponsors Salvadoran NGO House of Youth (Casa de Juventud), and offers training on public security. Canada plans to offer police training on solving complex cases and on crime scene management. Spain sponsors two gang-prevention programs, as well as Salvadoran NGO Carisma (Charisma). All emphasized the importance of funding social programs to prevent substance abuse and violence. Their efforts are laudable, and Post officers appreciated hearing their views on global counter-narcotics endeavors. This cable has been cleared by the other members of the MDG.
Barclay